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Quake rattles Kolkata, people flee buildings

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Ranji Trophy: J&K close in on historic title triumph

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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GDP growth revised upwards to 7-7.4%

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The economic growth projection for the next fiscal is revised upwards by 20 basis points to 7-7.4 per cent following the release of new GDP series, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said on Friday.

The Economic Survey presented in Parliament in January had projected a growth rate of 6.8-7.2 per cent for fiscal year 2026-27.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implem entation (MoSPI) is releasing the new series of annual and quarterly National Accounts Estimates with base year 2022–23, which replaces the previous series with base year of 2011–12.

"We are improving our GDP growth outlook for FY27 from 6.8 to 7.2 previously to 7 to 7.4 per cent under the new series...the economy is more likely to achieve a number closer to 7.4 per cent rather than 7 per cent," Nageswaran said while addressing a press conference on the release of new series. He also said that based on current indicators, nominal GDP growth would be close to 11 per cent and the size of the economy would comfortably cross USD 4 trillion-mark. —*PTI*

No proof in excise scam: Kejri, Sisodia vindicated

Court bins case against 20 others; CBI files appeal in HC

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

A Delhi trial court on Friday discharged former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia in the excise policy. It sharply pulled up the CBI for pursuing a case "wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny".

Among the 21 other people cleared in the case was Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha.

Hours after the verdict by special judge Jitendra Singh, the CBI filed an appeal challenging it in the Delhi High Court. Several aspects of the investigation were either ignored or not considered adequately, a spokesperson of the agency said.

Upon hearing about the clean chit, Kejriwal broke down and said the corruption case against him was the "biggest political conspiracy" in the history of Independent India.

The CBI had been probing an alleged corruption in the erstwhile AAP government's now scrapped excise liquor policy.

But the Delhi court was unsparing in its criticism.

The judge said the case's very foundation — the allegation of payment of upfront money and its purported recoupment — stands fundamentally eroded.

"The chargesheet suffers from internal contradictions, striking at the root of conspiracy theory," Justice Singh said.

"Investigation appears to have proceeded on a predetermined trajectory, implicating virtually every person associated with the formulation or implementation of the policy in order to lend an illusion of depth and credibility to an otherwise fragile narrative," it said in the 598-page judgement. "The excise policy case is wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny and stands discredited in its entirety."

Kejriwal was implicated without any cogent evidence, the judge said.

The judge also expressed displeasure that the CBI had used the term "South Group" to describe the accused, noting that that it was based on the accused's regional origin or place of residence. "Such labelling is not a mere irregularity of expression, it constitutes a constitutional infirmity capable of undermining the fairness of the proceedings."

The judge also directed a departmental inquiry against an investigating officer (IO) of the CBI for arraying public servant Kuldeep Singh as an accused. –*PTI*

AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal breaks down with party leader Manish Sisodia after the ruling, in New Delhi, on Friday —*PTI*

A CM & DyCM jailed for months

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia were jailed for five and 17 months respectively in the Delhi liquor excise scam case. When Kejriwal was arrested in 2024, he became the first sitting Chief Minister to go to jail. The Supreme Court later granted him bail.

I am not corrupt.... I challenge PM Modi to hold fresh polls in Delhi and if BJP wins over 10 seats, I will quit politics

-Arvind Kejriwal, former Delhi CM

AFTER AIADMK REBUKE

OPS joins DMK in Stalin's presence

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Former AIADMK chief minister O Panneerselvam joined the ruling DMK in the presence of Chief Minister MK Stalin.

Panneerselvam, a trusted confidant of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa, was expelled from the party in 2022, despite serving as the chief minister three time.

After unsuccessfully trying for over three years to rejoin his parent outfit again, Panneerselvam resigned as a member of the legislative assembly and joined the ruling party.

OPS, who was part of the AIADMK for nearly half a century, joins the DMK ahead of the critical upcoming Assembly elections.

Stalin described Panneerselvam "dear brother", praised his humility and said he welcomed the Mukkulathor community leader with open arms.

Along with OPS, his son P Ravindhranath Kumar also joined DMK

Former AIADMK CM O Panneerselvam embraces Chief Minister MK Stalin after joining the DMK, in Chennai on Friday—*PTI*

Speaking to reporters, OPS hit out at AIADMK Chief Edappadi K Palaniswami as an "autocrat" and "arrogant"'. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3, 5

Vijay's wife files for divorce

Sangeetha Vijay, wife of actor-politician and TVK founder Vijay has filed for divorce. She accused her husband of having an extra-marital relationship with an actress and that he has subjected her to "persistent mental cruelty, neglect and desertion". She prayed the court to conduct the entire proceedings in camera.

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CARNEY LANDS IN MUMBAI

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and his wife and economist Diana Fox Carney land in Mumbai on a four-day state visit. He will meet business leaders in Mumbai on 28 February and then fly to New Delhi on 1 March and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi the f ollowing day. —*PTI*

India world's fastest-growing economy: Carney

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on Friday kick-started a four-day visit to India that is focused on forging an ambitious partnership, especially in areas of trade, energy, technology and artificial intelligence. "India is the world's fastest-growing major economy," he said on social media. Carney seeks to rebuild ties that plummeted after Khalistani leader's killings.—*PTI*

Pak declares war on 'India's proxy' Afghan

ISLAMABAD, 27 FEB

Pakistan declared "open war" on Afghanistan on Friday, launching massive overnight airstrikes that killed over 130 Taliban fighters. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that "Taliban has become a proxy for India" and dubbed Afghanistan as an Indian colony. As violence escalated, India expressed concern with India's Ministry of External Affairs stating that India "strongly condemns Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory", highlighting that the attacks occurred during the holy month of Ramadan. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

EC-SIR CASE

SC bins WB's plea against officers' training

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain the West Bengal government's objection over the training module issued by the Election Commission for judicial officers deployed in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said the judicial officers would not be "influenced by anything" and that the orders passed by the SC in the matter were as clear as daylight.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for West Bengal, mentioned the matter before the bench. "While your lordships passed the order that all the modalities will be settled by the Chief Justice (of the Calcutta HC) and the committee, what they have done is they have issued directions to the judicial officers and given a training module saying that this is what they should accept and this is what they should not accept," Sibal told the bench.

- The bench said that the judicial officers would not be "influenced by anything" and that the orders passed by the SC were clear

The CJI, however, said the judicial officers deployed for the exercise in the state would take a decision on that. — *PTI*

Kerala HC paves way for release of 'The Kerala Story 2' film

KOCHI, 27 FEB

The Kerala High Court on Friday stayed for two weeks its single judge's interim order putting on hold for 15 days the release of 'The Kerala Story 2–Goes Beyond' film.

Justices Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and PV Balakrishnan passed the order on an appeal moved by the film's producer Vipul Amrutlal Shah late on Thursday night, hours after the movie's release was stayed. The bench had reserved order in the appeal on Thursday night.

Shah in his appeal had claimed that the film does not harm or denigrate the state of Kerala or any religious community.

"The film only portrays a social evil," his lawyers told the court.

Shah had also contended that if the film's release was put on hold, it would "financially finish" the producers as the movie is set to be screened in 1,500 theatres in India and over 300 abroad on 27 February.

The single judge had stayed the release of the film "as the possibility of communal disharmony or denigration of a community is also prima facie involved in the movie." Its release without scrutiny by the higher authorities would be legally improper, the judge had said. — *PTI*

Judge who heard case promoted

Kerala High Court judge Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari, who heard the 'Kerala Story 2' case, has been appointed as the new Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. Dharmadhikari will take charge on 6 March, a day after the retirement of the incumbent Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Srivastava. Dharmadhikari stayed the order that barred the release.

NAVY TARGETS 200 SHIPS BY 2035

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Indian Navy aims to become a 200-plus ship force by 2035, with plans to induct 15 additional vessels this year, said Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi. Speaking after commissioning INS Anjadip at Chennai Port, he emphasised achieving full self-reliance in shipbuilding by 2047.

The Navy's operations span the Indian Ocean and beyond, with units engaged in surveillance and anti-piracy. Tripathi highlighted ongoing indigenous shipbuilding, stating, "All 50 ships on order are being built in Indian yards," aiming for complete Atmanirbharta by 2047. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

FAKE KMF SCAM

Palm oil, chemicals used in producing fake milk in Kolar

KOLAR, 27 FEB

Fake milk was being manufactured using palm oil and chemical additives in Kolar district, with the police seizing 390 packets of fake Nandini milk powder packets.

Kolar Gold Fields superintendent of police, Shivanshu Rajput said that one litre of a mixture of palm oil, urea and chemicals was used to produce up to 20 litres of adulterated milk, which were supplied to dairies in Betamangala and its surrounding areas.

Millet milk laddoos (sweets) and other items were also used to produce adulterated milk, which were then sold at a cheaper rate.

Police teams conducted raids at different places in the district to unearth a major adulterated milk racket involving the misuse of the popular Nandini brand of the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF).

Eight people were arrested during a raid at Balagere village in KGF taluk. The police also seized large quantities of raw materials and equipment.

The accused were Venkateshappa, Balaj, Dilip, Balraj, Manohar, Karthik, Manoj and Manjunath. All of them are residents of Andhra Pradesh. On the instructions of Kolar Deputy Commissioner MR Ravi, the food safety authorities conducted raids in 32 locations in Kolar and collected over 42 samples, which were sent for chemical analysis. —*Salar News*

Police seized 390 packets of fake Nandini milk powder. Kolar produces at least 6.70 lakh litres of milk procured daily —*SALAR*

SC stays K'taka HC order, allows MLA to continue

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

In a major relief for Congress MLA SN Subbareddy, the Supreme Court put on hold a Karnataka High Court order which set aside his 2023 victory from the Bagepalli Assembly Constituency.

The bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said that Subbareddy shall continue to an MLA. "The counter-affidavit shall be filed within six weeks".

The Karnataka High Court had set aside Subbareddy's election last week, saying that he had full disclosure of his assets were not made. However, the Court did not declare the BJP candidate as the winner.

"When you don't win the election, then you start digging out," Kant remarked. "Courts cannot perform the role of a chartered accountant."—*Agencies*

Lokayukta catches Bidar officials accepting bribe

BIDAR, 27 FEB

An Executive Engineer (EE) of the Rural Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, Ramalingappa Biradar, and office staff member Baburao were caught red-handed by the Karnataka Lokayukta while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 50,000. The raid took place at the department office functioning within the premises of the Bidar Zilla Panchayat in Bidar. On Thursday, Lokayukta police conducted the raid on office staff member Baburao following a complaint saying that the latter had demanded Rs. 50000. The operation was carried out under the guidance of Lokayukta SP Siddaraju and led by DySP Hanumantharay. Officials have seized documents from the office and are conducting further investigation in the matter, sources said.—*SALAR NEWS*

Man held for theft, Rs 33.50 lakh recovered

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

A man was arrested in the City for allegedly cheating a jewellery shop owner by misusing his employer's name and collecting seven gold chains worth Rs 33.50 lakh, police said. A complaint was filed at Bharathinagar police station in the City on 23 September, 2025. The accused, Dharamvir Singh of Rajasthan, was found with 239gm of gold worth Rs 33.50 lakh. Police said he visited the store claiming his employer had sent him to collect the chains. Acting on credible information, police secured him near Yeshwantpur Railway Station on 19 February, 2026. "During interrogation, he confessed that he had committed the offence with the intention of making quick money," a senior officer said. —*PTI*

3 school teachers booked for cutting student's hair

RAICHUR, 27 FEB

A complaint has been filed at Sindhanur Town Police Station in Raichur against three teachers of Holy Family School for allegedly humiliating a student by cutting his hair over a trivial reason. According to parent's complaint, the school teachers Father Gyan Prakash and assistant teachers Vishalakshi and Swathi cut the boy's hair and behaved in a degrading manner. The parent said he tried calling Father Gyan Prakash for clarification, but the call went unanswered. When he visited the school, he alleged that Father Gyan Prakash did not behave properly with him. Police have registered a case under Sections 75 and 82 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2026, and Sections 115(2) and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Further investigation is being conducted—*SALAR NEWS*

Kalaburagi DC's car seized for delay in land compensation

KALABURAGI, 27 FEB

The Kalaburagi Principal Sessions Court ordered the seizure of the official vehicle of Deputy Commissioner Fouzia Taranum over long-pending land compensation to farmers. The case dates back to 2005, when over 50 acres of fertile land near Nandikur village were acquired for a water treatment plant by the Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Drainage Board and the Kalaburagi City Corporation. Farmers were promised compensation but alleged that payments were delayed for nearly 19 years despite court directions. Expressing displeasure over non-compliance, the court also issued an arrest warrant against the Executive Engineer and ordered seizure of the DC's official vehicle. Officials assured the court that compensation would be paid by 12 March.—*Salar News*

Rohith Vemula, honour killing bills referred for further review

The bills will be placed before the next Cabinet meeting

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Rohith Vemula; Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil *PHOTO: PTI*

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said that the State Cabinet has discussed key legislations, including the proposed Rohith Vemula Bill and the honour killing Bill, and decided to seek further inputs before taking them forward.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting on Thursday, Patil said the proposed legislations were examined in detail, and certain aspects required additional consultation with the Home Department.

"The Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2026, was discussed in the Cabinet. As certain aspects require the opinion of the Home Department, it has been referred back to it and will be placed before the next Cabinet meeting. This relates to human rights," the minister said.

He said the draft Karnataka Rohith Vemula (Prevention of Exclusion or Injustice) Right to Education and Dignity Bill, 2026, was also deliberated upon by the Cabinet.

"The draft Rohith Vemula Bill was also discussed today. After obtaining certain inputs from the Home Department, it will be placed before the next Cabinet meeting for finalisation," Patil said.

Asked if the Rohith Vemula Bill would apply only to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or also include Other Backward Classes, Patil said, "We will discuss the matter when it comes to you as an approved Bill."

Patil reiterated that both the Rohith Vemula Bill and the honour killing Bill would be brought back before the Cabinet after the home department's views are received.

Rohit Vemula was a PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad from the Dalit community. He allegedly died by suicide after facing institutional discrimination, triggering widespread outrage. —*PTI*

BANK LOANS TAKEN

Mysuru farmer dies by suicide over debt, low tobacco prices

MYSURU, 27 FEB

A debt-ridden tobacco grower has committed suicide by consuming poison at his agriculture fields at AG Koppalu in Periyapatna taluk in Mysuru.

The deceased is Siddegowda, 41, police said.

The incident occurred on 26 February, when Siddegowda, upset over fall in prices of tobacco and mounting debt, took the extreme step to end his life.

According to his family members, the tobacco producer had borrowed from both money lenders and local banks. He had borrowed more than Rs 10 lakh in loan. The money lenders had asked him to clear the loan amount, which he was unable to repay back to them.

The Periyapatna police have registered a case and an investigation is being conducted into the incident.

The steep fall in tobacco prices has resulted in anxiety among growers of the region. There was a dip in sales following a 40 per cent hike in tax on cigarettes by the Centre. As a result, several manufacturers of tobacco products did not procure raw tobacco from farmers of Mysuru and other regions in the State. The tobacco board has also suspended tobacco auctions in Hunsur, Periyapatna, and several other places following protest from tobacco growers. Help is available, please call Tele Manas at 14416, Sahai at 08025497777. —*Salar News*

BETTER PAY

Members of Karnataka State Samyuktha Asha workers association staged a protest demanding an increase in the honorarium in the upcoming Karnataka State Budget, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday –*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BJP to launch 'Save Mysore Silk' campaign

MYSURU, 27 FEB

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Friday warned that the BJP would launch a statewide 'Save Mysore Silk' campaign if the government proceeds with plans to allot KSIC land in T Narasipura for a stadium.

Joining protesting employees, he alleged that transferring five acres would eventually shut down the profit-making Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation (KSIC), affecting nearly 2,000 workers.

Ashoka claimed six acres of the 13-acre yarn-spinning unit had already been handed to the Sports Department and accused Congress leaders of pushing the Rs 12 crore project for "commissions." He said KSIC earned Rs 96 crore profit in 2025-26 and produces about 1,400 sarees a month in Channapatna, with demand far exceeding supply.

He highlighted the legacy of Mysore silk, recalling efforts of Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar in promoting sericulture. —*Salar News*

'NDA will decide CM candidate'

Ashoka said that the NDA's national level High Command leaders will decide who will be the Chief Ministerial face. He said this reacting to JD(S) State Youth President Nikhil Kumaraswamy saying HD Kumaraswamy will be Chief Minister of the State.

'USE AI ETHICALLY'

GFAX will generate 20 lakh jobs in 5 yrs: Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Dy CM DK Shivakumar during the inauguration of 7th edition of GAFX Summit in Bengaluru on Friday-*SALAR*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said Artificial Intelligence must remain a tool to enhance human creativity and not replace artists, stressing ethical use, protection of intellectual property and fair compensation in the AVGC-XR sector.

He said the sector had potential to generate 20 lakh jobs in the State in the next five years.

Speaking after inaugurating the seventh edition of Bengaluru GAFX- Games, Animation and Visual Effects Conference, themed "Evolution Reloaded", in the City, he reaffirmed Karnataka's commitment to the AVGC-XR sector was not recent or reactive, asserting, "We have been pioneers."

"Today, GAFX represents the next great frontier. The Games, Animation and Visual Effects sector is no longer a small creative industry. GAFX is shaping how humanity experiences stories, culture, education and even governance," he said.

"Technology should amplify human potential, not erase it. The soul of storytelling is human emotion, something no algorithm can replicate in its fullness," he said.

He called for ethical use of AI, saying, it should have "respect for intellectual property, data privacy, (and) fair compensation".

Emphasising expansion beyond Bengaluru, Siddaramaiah said digital creative clusters are being promoted in Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi-Dharwad, Kalaburagi and other emerging cities.

"We want the next great game designer or VFX innovator to emerge not only from the capital, but from every district of Karnataka," he said.

The CM said Karnataka should be known not only as the Silicon Valley of India but also as the "Creative Capital" of the Digital World.

With the potential to create 20 lakh jobs over the next five years, the sector would generate employment across sections such as design, coding, storytelling, music, motion capture, AI modelling and production management, the Chief Minister said.

Outlining five strategic priorities, Siddaramaiah said the State would focus on building a future-ready talent pipeline, strengthening infrastructure, supporting startups and original intellectual property, expanding opportunities beyond Bengaluru, and building global partnerships.—*PTI*

SC SHOULD HAVE DONE MORE: PRIYANK ON NCERT

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Karnataka IT Minister Priyank Kharge on Friday reacted to the Supreme Court imposing a "complete blanket ban" on the Class 8 NCERT book, stating that "SC should have done more" over the misinformation in the textbooks

Kharge said, "While the court has justified what it has done, a little more proactivity from the court would also help. A lot of misinformation is being put in our textbooks, whether it is altered history, mythology being passed off as history, the decline of scientific temperament in society, or the erosion of the social fabric of the country. While the Supreme Court has safeguarded the institution, which is of prime importance because people still have faith in it, I think the Supreme Court should also take action on many other issues, which would help the progress of the country." —*ANI*

Explosives recovered from Raichur gold mines' entrance

RAICHUR, 27 FEB

More than 15 explosive cartridges were found near the entrance of Hutti Gold Mines Limited in Lingasugur taluk in Raichur district.

The incident has created panic among local residents and workers.

It is not yet known to whom the explosives belonged. Security personnel and senior officials of the Hutti Gold Mines were alerted.

Police officials from the Hutti Police Station rushed to the spot and conducted an inspection.

The police have launched an investigation into the incident. They are trying to determine whether the explosives were meant for gold mining operations at Hatti or for use in private stone quarries.

"We are trying to trace the people who transported the explosives to the entrance of the gold mines and from where it was brought," a police officiasl told Salar News.

Eyewitnesses stated that riders travelling on a Pulsar bike may have dropped the explosive cartridges while passing through the area. Concerns have also been raised about the transportation of such dangerous explosives in absence of any preventive measures. — *Salar News*

Loyalists lobby for Shivakumar as CM

BENGALURU/ MYSURU, 27 FEB

Dozens of "like minded" supporters of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar gathered at a hotel to strategise how they could make their leader the Chief Minister.

Magadi MLA HC Balakrishna organised the gathering to discuss how "to end the confusion regarding power sharing" with the 40 MLAs on Thursday. They decided to lobby for Shivakumar's elevation, Congress sources said.

"If our party continues like this, it will be difficult for us in the future," Balakrishna said. "The High Command must give a final shape to this issue.".

However, Shivakumar on Friday said he did not know about the meeting.

"Whether they change the President or the CM is the High Command's decision. But a decision must be made...," Balakrishna added.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) Working President Tanveer Sait the said that if the High Command didn't provide clarity soon, there could be a major political crisis.

CONG WORKER WRITES TO KHARGE

Meanwhile, a Congress worker in Mysuru, KP Bhagyaraj, has written a letter to party Chief Mallikarjun Kharge, urging him to appoint Shivakumar as the chief minister.—*Salar News with Agencies*

A TALE FROM GADAG

Barbers refuse to cut dalit's hair; govt opens salon for all

HIREKOP RAJAN SAMUEL
GADAG, 27 FEB

In a rapid response to alleged caste-based discrimination, the Gadag district administration has facilitated the opening of a barber shop in Singatalur village of Mundargi taluk, where members of the Dalit community were reportedly denied hair-cutting services by local barbers.

Officials described the initiative as a rare administrative measure to address a social issue, possibly the first of its kind in the State.

Deputy Commissioner CN Sreedhara said the issue was resolved with support from the State Shivasharana Hadapada Appanna community.

"Dalits were denied hair-cutting services by upper-caste barbers. The issue has been addressed by opening a shop, which has been functioning since 26 February," he said.

The matter came to light after multiple complaints that barbers in the village had refused to serve Dalits. Despite intervention by the tahsildar through notices and meetings, the barbers remained defiant and even shut their shops.

Villagers linked the refusal to a long-standing belief associated with the Mahanavami festival, during which the deity of Veerabhadreshwara Swamy Temple is believed to visit homes of the Hadapada (barber) community.

The initiative is an effort to address caste discrimination -*SALAR*

During this period, offering services such as haircuts to Dalits is considered inauspicious. Taking cognisance of the situation, the district administration, along with the Social Welfare Department, Taluk Panchayat and police, initiated measures to ensure access to services without discrimination.

Devappa Hadapada, State President of the Shivasharana Hadapada Appanna community, extended support by deputing his brother to run the shop. The facility is government-supported but not government-run; the operator is not a government employee and will retain all earnings.

"He has brought the required equipment himself," the Deputy Commissioner said. Police personnel have been deployed to ensure the safety of the shop and its operator.

Officials also clarified that the shop should not be presented as a "government shop" or display any such signage.

Community members said the refusal was temporary and limited to the festival period. "After Mahanavami, services are normally resumed for all," Hadapada stated, expressing hope that no one from the barber community would oppose the move.

Residents from the Dalit community welcomed the administration's intervention, noting that it prevented the issue from escalating. Local barbers also indicated support, saying the decision could help challenge such beliefs and promote social equality. The Social Welfare Department and Taluk Panchayat provided space and basic support for the operator in the village.

—*SALAR NEWS*

LIQUOR EXCISE CASE IN THE HINDSIGHT

November 2021
Delhi govt brings new excise policy.

July 2022

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena recommends CBI probe into alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of exercise policy.

August 2022
CBI and ED register cases in the matter.

September 2022
Excise policy scrapped.

October 2023 to March 2024
Kejriwal gets 9 ED summonses regarding money-laundering case.

21 March 2024
Delhi HC refuses to grant protection from arrest to Kejriwal. ED arrests Kejriwal.

10 May 2024
SC grants interim bail to Kejriwal till June 1 to campaign in the Lok Sabha polls, asks him to go back to jail on 2 June.

20 June 2024
The trial court grants regular bail to Kejriwal.

25 June 2024
HC stays Kejriwal's bail given by the trial court.

26 June 2024
CBI formally arrests Kejriwal from jail in a corruption case related to the excise policy.

12 July 2024
SC grants interim bail to Kejriwal, but he stays in the jail.

13 Sep 2024
SC grants bail to Kejriwal, says prolonged incarceration amounts to unjust deprivation of liberty.

27 Feb 2026
Delhi court discharges Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the case.

The court has proved that Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and AAP are 'Kattar Imaandar'

Kejriwal terms liquor excise case 'fake', BJP 'conspiracy'

Says it was to finish AAP; Kavitha says judciary cut through web of lies

Celebrations errupt in New Delhi as Kejriwal is vindicated. Telangana Jagruthi President K Kavitha being greeted by a supporter in Hyderabad after a Delhi court discharged her in a liquor policy case on Friday —PTI

NEWDELHI/HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah after being discharged by a court here in the liquor policy case on Friday, alleging they hatched a conspiracy to finish off the Aam Aadmi Party through a "fake" case which was part of the "biggest political conspiracy" in independent India's history.

The court has given a historic verdict, Kejriwal said, adding that the judge showed tremendous courage in passing the order "under the existing circumstances when all institutions are under assault".

"The court has proved that Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and AAP are 'Kattar Imaandar'," Kejriwal said, accompanied by former deputy chief minister of Delhi Sisodia.

Slamming the BJP, Kejriwal said he has earned only honesty and reputation in his entire life, which was being attacked by Modi and Shah through a "fake" liquor scam case.

"BJP has thrown Delhi into chaos with problems like pollution, polluted Yamuna, damaged roads... I challenge PM Modi to hold fresh polls in Delhi and if BJP wins over 10 seats, I will quit politics," Kejriwal asserted.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia (L) at a press conference after a Delhi court discharged them in New Delhi on Friday —PTI

Reacting to the order, Sisodia said the ruling reaffirmed the public's faith in the Constitution.

"Despite all the attempts by the BJP and its agencies to prove us dishonest, today it has been established that Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia are honest," the former Delhi education minister said in a post on X.

Leader of Opposition and former chief minister Atishi said the party had endured sustained pressure during the investigation.

Separately, in Hyderabad, Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha expressed relief over being discharged in the Delhi excise policy case and said the judiciary has cut through the "web of lies" in the case.

"Satyamev Jayate (truth alone triumphs). This (case) was a web of lies. Judiciary has cut right through it," she told reporters

She slammed her brother and BRS Working President K T Rama Rao for saying that BRS was the political casualty of the "narrative" of the "liquor scam". —PTI

> Our country runs on the judiciary. The judicial system is the supreme system in the country. Ours is a big country comprising several political parties, castes, creeds and religions, and still it is running properly because of the judicial system.
>
> Anna Hazare- Social worker

> Today's judgement discharging Kejriwal, Sisodia & Kavitha in the excise policy case exposes the high handedness of investigative agencies.
>
> -Mehbooba Mufti, PDP president

> Satyameva Jayate! BJP learn your lesson while there is still time. All your dirty tricks, your ED, your CBI - all these puppets will die in the face of truth. Congratulations @ArvindKejriwal.
>
> -Mahua Moitra, TMC MP

Delhi BJP attacks Kejri, says legal process not over

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

In its response to the discharge of AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia by a city court in the excise policy case, the Delhi BJP on Friday said several questions surrounding the policy remained unanswered and asserted that the legal process was far from over. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the court, in its judgment, had acknowledged a lack of evidence at this stage, but added that the investigative agency had repeatedly alleged destruction of evidence.

"The court, in its judgment has acknowledged the lack of evidence, and the investigating agency has repeatedly stated that Kejriwal and Sisodia destroyed evidence," Sachdeva said. —PTI

Kejri's clean chit, BJP's predictable script, says Cong

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

With a Delhi court discharging former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the liquor policy case, the Congress on Friday said it was a "predictable script" from the BJP and proceedings against its convenient "allies" in the AAP, and others will quietly vanish in light of the Gujarat and Punjab elections.

The Congress termed the BJP a "shape-shifter, a wishful serpent -- Icchadhari Naag".

Reacting to the development, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said,

"The BJP is not a political party. It is a shape-shifter, a wishful serpent - Icchadhari Naag. It will stoop to any level for one obsessive goal: defeat Congress - Congress Mukt Bharat." —PTI

MURMU INDIA'S F1RST PREZ TO FLY ON 'PRACHAND'

President Droupadi Murmu before undertaking a sortie in the HAL Light Combat Helicopter 'Prachand' at Air Force Station, in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan —PTI

SKM seeks Goyal's ouster over India-US trade deal

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Thursday announced two nationwide campaigns to press state governments to oppose the India-US trade deal and seek Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's dismissal.

SKM delegations will meet Chief Ministers and Leaders of the Opposition in all states and seek special Assembly sessions to adopt resolutions on the issues raised.

The SKM, in a memorandum, urged the state governments to ask the Centre not to sign the trade deal and withdraw the Union Finance Ministry's direction to end bonus payments on wheat and paddy.

India and the US had agreed on a framework to finalise an interim trade deal, under which Washington will cut down tariffs to 18 per cent.

The SKM also demanded repeal of the four labour codes and the VB G RAM G Act, and restoration of the MGNREGA Act.

As part of its campaign titled 'Strong states for strong India', the farmers' collective called for amending the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act, 2017, and restoring the taxation powers of the states and increasing their share in the divisible pool of central taxes to 60 per cent.

The states should enact laws to guarantee minimum support price at C2+50 per cent for all crops with assured procurement, and provide comprehensive loan waivers to address rural indebtedness and farmer suicides. —PTI

In Odisha, WB SIR officials mistaken for child-lifters, attacked

BALASORE, 27 FEB

Two officials deputed for special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal were assaulted by locals in Odisha's Balasore district over suspicion of being child-lifters.

The incident took place on 25 February when the two entered a village in Balasore district, which shares a border with Bengal. They were deputed as micro-observers for SIR work and were supposed to visit a village in Nayagram block in Bengal, but had entered the bordering village in Odisha by 'mistake' as their rickshaw could not locate exact location, police said. The locals suspected them of being members of child-lifting gang and assaulted them. —PTI

EPS behaving as a dictator, says OPS on joining DMK

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

Expelled All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham leader **O Panneerselvam** on Friday asserted that he has, with "full joy", became a part of the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) and alleged that AIADMK general secretary Edapaddi K Palaniswami was acting as a "dictator" within the party.

OPS emphasised that he had joined DMK to put a full stop to his "bitter experience".

"The decision I've taken is my own, to put a full-stop to the bitter experience for me. I thank CM and DMK President Stalin for accepting me to join DMK. I have joined DMK with full joy. EPS is behaving as a dictator and he has created a situation where AIADMK cannot get victory hereafter," Panneerselvam told media.

Panneerselvam joined DMK in the presence of party chief and Chief Minister MK Stalin in Chennai. His son P Ravindhranath Kumar also joined DMK ahead of the forthcoming Tamil Nadu polls.

He further stated that EPS has made sure that no leader from southern part of the country becomes strong and also credited Stalin for providing good governance within Tamil Nadu. OPS added that DMK is working towards making "Dravidian Model" strong and said that he would work towards the party's development.

"Stalin is giving good governance to people, and people are watching it...EPS is keen on making sure no leaders from the South become strong. To save Dravidian Movement, policy of the Dravidian, it's the DMK which is working. I have just joined as a cadre. I will be one among the party cadres and work for the party's development," O Panneeselvam said. —ANI

14 arrested in Delhi in JNU protest case

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Fourteen protesters were arrested in connection with a demonstration at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) here on Thursday evening, police said. Those held include JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) President Aditi Mishra, Vice President Gopika Babu, former president Nitish Kumar, and joint secretary Danish Ali, among others, they said. Police said an FIR has been registered under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Vasant Kunj North Police Station. The arrests followed an attempted march by JNUSU members, who had gathered at Sabarmati T-Point on the campus and sought to move towards the education ministry as part of ongoing protests over JNU Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit's recent remarks on a podcast regarding implementation of UGC norms, rustication of JNUSU office-bearers, and proposed Rohith Act. A total of 51 protesters were detained on Thursday. —PTI

'RELATIONSHIP WITH AN ACTRESS'

Vijay's wife Sangeetha files for divorce over alleged infidelity

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

In a shocking turn of events, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) Chief and actor Vijay's wife Sangeetha Sornalingam has filed a petition for divorce against him in the Chengalpattu family court in Chennai.

This comes amid reports that Sangeetha has been living separately from her husband.

As per the divorce petition, Sankgeetha has accused Vijay of infidelity, alleging that he has had an "adulterous relationship" with an actress.

"In April 2021, the Petitioner (Sangeetha) discovered that the Respondent (Vijay) was involved in an adulterous relationship with an actress. This caused her deep emotional pain and mental suffering, amounting to betrayal and violation of marital trust," the petition stated, adding that the actor "continued open association with the actress," which caused Sangeetha emotional agony and embarrassment to the children.

"Since 2021, Vijay had emotionally withdrawn, treating his wife with verbal disdain and subjecting her to constructive desertion, forcing her to live separately within the matrimonial home. Vijay continued to travel abroad and attend public events, with the said actress," it said.

Sangeetha also alleged that the actress regularly posted pictures of her outings with the actor on social media. "The actress regularly posted photographs of these outings on social media. Vijay neither denied nor objected to the posts, thereby tacitly endorsing them," she added.

Vijay and Sangeetha met for the first time in 1996. A Sri Lankan, Sangeetha, was brought up in Britain. The couple registered their marriage in 1998 in the UK. —ANI

Swami Saraswati welcomes HC stay on POCSO case

VARANASI, 27 FEB

Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati on Friday welcomed the Allahabad High Court's decision to stay his arrest in a POCSO case and termed the charge against him "false", as his disciples and supporters celebrated the development at a Varanasi ashram.

The spiritual leader has been accused of sexually exploiting two persons, including a minor.

The Allahabad High Court reserved its order on Saraswati's anticipatory bail plea and directed that he shall not be arrested till the pronouncement of its order, which is expected in the third week of March. It also asked the state government and the informant to file their replies in the matter and directed the applicant to cooperate in the investigation.

Reacting to the high court's grant of interim protection, Saraswati said, "Our advocates submitted before the court that these children never stayed with us. The children themselves are saying that they stayed in Jyotirmath and not with us."

Terming the charges against him "fabricated", the seer expressed his faith in the judiciary.

"The batuks (young disciples) never stayed in the ashram. The entire Hindu community was hurt by this incident. We welcome the court's decision," he said.

Before the developments in the court, Saraswati, on Friday, said he was willing to undergo a narco analysis test if it helped establish the truth in the sexual abuse case registered against him. On Thursday, Saraswati told reporters that he has filed a case against the accuser, Ashutosh Brahmachari, under the POCSO Act, claiming the law allows legal action against those who file false cases. —PTI

Journo elected Hazaribagh mayor

RANCHI, 27 FEB

Arvind Rana, a journalist with a Hindi newspaper, won the post of mayor in the Hazaribagh Municipal Corporation polls by defeating his nearest Congress-backed rival Sarfarz.

An official said that in Ranchi, the BJP-backed mayor candidate Roshni Khalkho was leading by 13,511 votes against Congress-supported Rama Khalkho after the first round of counting. There are five rounds of counting.

The counting of votes for the polls to 48 urban local bodies in Jharkhand has been underway from Friday morning, and it will conclude on Saturday, where the exercise will not be completed by night, State Election Commission Secretary Radhe Shyam Prasad said.

The civic polls were not contested on the electoral symbols of the political parties, but candidates are backed by political parties.

The elections were held on 23 February, with over 63 per cent of the 43 lakh voters exercising their franchise. — PTI

Man murdered over WhatsApp display picture

PALGHAR, 27 FEB

A 24-year-old man was stabbed to death in front of his wife in Nalasopara East in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Friday reportedly due to a dispute over a WhatsApp display picture, a police official said. The incident took place at 4:30 am in Hanuman Nagar locality, the official added. "Mehndi Hassan Sheikh, 25, stabbed Aftab Sheikh in front of the latter's wife after an argument over the WhatsApp DP of Mehndi's son. Aftab died on the spot," he said. Residents of the area claimed Mehndi was a Bangladeshi who has served a sentence for a serious crime. Mehndi was held shortly after the crime and has been charged with murder. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

SC quashes FIR against former Zee Rajasthan official

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court came down heavily on the Rajasthan Police on Friday for filing an FIR for blackmailing and extortion against the former regional head of Zee Rajasthan as per a complaint from the Zee Media company, and said it was shocked at the manner in which the case was lodged. Quashing the FIR against Ashish Dave, Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said the police officer investigating the case should have made an inquiry before registering the complaint. The court said that the FIR was lodged only because the complainant (the media company) was an affluent agency.—*PTI*

Man held for cheating women via marriage sites

THANE, 27 FEB

The crime branch of Navi Mumbai police arrested a man, 34, for allegedly posing as an ISRO scientist and a PWD official to cheat and sexually exploit women after promising to marry them. Adarsh Prashant Mhatre, a resident of Alibag, allegedly used over a dozen aliases to lure highly educated women, including engineers and doctors, through matrimonial sites like Shaadi.com, Bharat Matrimony, and Jeevansathi.com, a police release said. He is suspected to have cheated women of Rs 89.40 lakh. Mhatre allegedly created accounts on matrimonial sites using fake ID cards of the ISRO and the PWD and uploaded photos indicating a luxurious life. —*PTI*

—*FREEPIK*

Teen gives birth in school washroom during exam

DHAR, 27 FEB

A 17-year-old girl appearing for Class 10 board examination gave birth to a pre-mature baby in the washroom of a private school in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district. ASP Parul Belapurkar said on Friday that the incident occurred in Pithampura on Tuesday. The teen complained of severe stomach ache two hours into the examination and sought permission to go to the washroom. When she did not return, the invigilators checked the washroom and heard the cries of a newborn. The girl and the infant were brought to a community health centre in an 108 ambulance. Both the teen and the baby are stable.—*PTI*

Quake rattles Kolkata, people flee buildings

5.5 quake had epicentre in B'desh; no casualty reported

KOLKATA, 27 FEB

Tremors were felt in Kolkata and adjacent districts of West Bengal on Friday afternoon, after an earthquake of 5.5 magnitude on the Richter Scale jolted parts of Bangladesh, officials said.

The quake was felt at around 1.22 pm, an India Meteorological Department (IMD) official said, and left people in panic. The quake was recorded at a depth of 10 km below Earth's surface.

The epicentre of the quake was the Satkhira district of Bangladesh, located 100 km from Kolkata and barely 25 km from the bordering areas of Taki in North 24 Parganas district, he said.

There was no immediate report of any loss of life or major damage in the state, although employees of some establishments in northern Kolkata claimed that walls developed cracks as a result of the jolts. The tremors lasted for some 10 seconds, throwing people in Kolkata into panic, prompting them to scurry out of their buildings and seek the safety of open streets.

People stand outside buildings as tremors were felt in Kolkata city and in the adjacent districts of West Bengal on Friday after an earthquake epicentered in its Satkhira district hit Bangladesh —*PTI*

No aftershocks of the quake were immediately felt after the first bout of tremors.

Panic gripped government employees working at the state secretariat, Nabanna, the assembly house and at the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, who continued to remain on the streets in apprehension of aftershocks.

Similar scenes were witnessed at the city's IT hub in Salt Lake and at multi-storey residential buildings in various parts of Kolkata.

"I was sitting on a sofa in the lobby of the Assembly House when I realised that the seat was moving unnaturally. I realised this was an earthquake and rushed out of the building with others," Karabi Manna, the MLA of Haripal in Hooghly district, told a Bengali TV channel. — *PTI*

NATURAL JUSTICE

Holding passport part of personal rights: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The right to hold a passport and travel abroad is an integral part of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, the Delhi High Court said.

When any action of the authorities impinges on such a right, the court asserted, it must be reasonable and be in accordance with justice. Justice Purushaindra Kumar passed the order while setting aside the Centre's decision to impound the passport of Yogesh Raheja, the erstwhile Director of Raheja Developers, for failing to disclose tan FIR against him at the time of applying for renewal.

The order impounding the petitioner's passport was passed by the authorities on 17 January 2025, and his appeal against the decision was rejected by the appellate authority on 25 March 2025.

The petitioner's counsel said, as per a 2019 office memorandum by the Ministry of External Affairs, mere registration of an FIR did not amount to pendency of criminal proceedings for issuance of a passport unless a court has taken cognisance of the offence. The court observed that the reasons assigned by the authorities to impound the petitioner's passport is not legal, as he had applied for renewal of his passport in October 2024 and cognisance was taken only in February 2025. a month after the impounding order. "It is evident that the decision passed by the respondents cannot be sustained." — *PTI*

Aryan Khan drug case: HC okays action against Wankhede

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Friday allowed the continuation of disciplinary proceedings against IRS officer Sameer Wankhede in connection with the 2021 Cordelia cruise drugs case.

Justices Anil Kshetarpal and Amit Mahajan allowed the Centre's plea against a CAT order which quashed the disciplinary proceedings against Wankhede.

The Centre challenged the CAT order dated 19 January, quashing the 'Charge Memorandum' issued to Wankhede on 18 August 2025, by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.

Wankhede, a 2008 batch IRS officer, hit headlines for allegedly demanding Rs 25 crore from Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's family by threatening to implicate his son Aryan Khan in the Cordelia cruise drug bust case during his service with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Mumbai in 2021.

Before the CAT, Wankhede filed an application challenging the disciplinary inquiry against him by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs for allegedly seeking confidential information regarding the probe from the NCB's legal department after he was relieved from the agency.

It was also alleged that he sought an "assurance" from the NCB's legal officer that he would "steer the investigation."

On 12 January, the HC refused to interfere with a CAT order staying the disciplinary proceedings against Wankhede.

It had, however, asked Central Administrative Tribunal to make "sincere efforts" to decide the main matter on 14 January or within the next 10 days. — *PTI*

Meghalaya sounds alert as meningitis kills 2 Agniveers

SHILLONG, 27 FEB

The Meghalaya government has issued a public health advisory after suspected cases of meningococcal infection were reported at an Army training Centre here, officials said on Friday.

The advisory follows recent reports of two Agniveer trainees who died due to suspected meningococcal infection, prompting the authorities to identify all contacts, keeping them in isolation, besides fumigating affected areas.

Health authorities have intensified monitoring in institutions and communities where close contact may increase the risk of transmission, although they emphasised that there is no cause for panic. The Health and Family Welfare Department on Thursday said the State Surveillance Unit (SSU) has been notified of the suspected cases, and an active epidemiological investigation has been launched.

"The District Surveillance Unit (DSU), East Khasi Hills, and the SSU have initiated an epidemiological investigation. Case investigation, contact tracing, laboratory review, and surveillance strengthening measures are underway," the advisory issued by Commissioner and Secretary Dr Joram Beda said. The SSU reassured the public that the situation is being closely monitored and is under control, adding that no new suspected cases have been detected in any other area so far.

All public health measures, including identification and monitoring of close contacts and implementation of preventive interventions, are being carried out as per standard protocols, it said. — *PTI*

Kerala govt files appeal in 2017 actress assault case

KOCHI, 27 FEB

The Kerala government on Friday moved an appeal in the Kerala HC challenging the acquittal of Malayalam cinema star Dileep and others in the 2017 actress sexual assault case.

In its appeal, the state is also seeking enhancement of the punishment awarded to the six people to 20 years of.

Apart from Dileep, the eighth accused in the case, the trial court had also acquitted three others, Charley Thomas, A7, Sanil Kumar alias Mesthri Sanil, A9, and Sarath, A15. The trial court had convicted the first six accused in the case. — *PTI*

SC collegium to transfer new HC CJs in advance

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court collegium has taken a "policy decision" that a judge, who is proposed to take over the high court as its chief justice, may be transferred well in advance, preferably two months before the vacancy arises.

The collegium, headed by the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, said the decision was taken so that the judge becomes well conversant with the affairs of that high court and assumes charge of the office of the chief justice on the retirement of the incumbent chief justice.

"The collegium has taken a policy decision that in order to strengthen efficiency in the administration of justice, a judge who is proposed to take over the high court as its chief justice may be transferred well in advance, preferably two months before the vacancy arises," said a statement uploaded on the SC website.

"As per this policy, the collegium has resolved to recommend the transfer of Justice Lisa Gill, judge, High Court of Punjab and Haryana, to the High Court of Andhra Pradesh and for her appointment as the chief justice of that high court with effect from the date the vacancy arises," the statement said.

The SC collegium, which held its meeting on 26 February, also recommended the appointment of Kerala HC judge Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari as the chief justice of the Madras High Court, after the retirement of the chief justice of that high court on 5 March 2026. — *PTI*

Apex court to hear challenge against SHANTI Act

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a plea challenging the SHANTI Act, 2025, which the petitioners argue pits national interest against potential losses. Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi, described the matter requires detailed examination.

Advocates, including Prashnt Bhushan, argued the Act violates Articles 14, 19, and 21. He along with advocate Neha Rathi submitted that the Act which replaced Civil Liability for Nuclear Liability Act of 2010 permits companies to set up civilian N-plants but exempts them from liability beyond Rs 3,000 crore while in the case of nuclear accidents, the loss is likely to be more than Rs 10 lakh crore as was the case in the 1986 Chernobyl and the 2011 Fukushima accident in Japan.

The petition criticised the cap on liability citing Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters. — *PTI*

SC grants bail to doctor in 2024 Porsche accident case

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court granted bail to a doctor arrested for allegedly tampering with the blood samples of a 17-year-old boy, accused of crashing a Porsche car into a motorcycle in Pune and killing two persons.

The incident dates back to 19 May 2024, when the Porsche driven by the 17-year-old who had consumed alcohol fatally knocked down two IT professionals in Pune.

Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan granted bail to Dr Ajay Taware on Friday on parity grounds.

The court, on 2 February, had granted bail to three of the accused in the case, observing that parents have to be blamed for such incidents.

Noting that the accused, Amar Santish Gaikwad (an alleged middleman), Aditya Avinash Sood and Ashish Satish Mittal (the parents of two other juveniles in the car), were in custody for 18 months, the bench had granted bail to them.

The incident dates back to 19 May 2024, when the Porsche car allegedly driven by the 17-year-old, who had consumed allegedly alcohol, fatally knocked down two IT professionals in Pune —*PTI*

On 23 January, the Supreme Court had sought a response from the Maharashtra government on a bail plea filed by Gaikwad.

Earlier on 7 January, the court sought a response from the Maharashtra government regarding the pleas filed by two other accused, seeking bail.

Sood, 52, and Mittal, 37, were arrested on 19 August 2025, as their blood samples were used for tests in connection with the two minors who were in the car along with the 17-year-old main accused at the time of the accident.

The Bombay High Court had rejected the bail pleas of the eight accused, including Gaikwad, Sood and Mittal on 16 December 2025. — *PTI*

ANTI-SUBMARINE WARFARE

'Dolphin Hunter' INS Anjadip inducted

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

The Indian Navy on Friday commissioned INS Anjadip, a warship aimed at augmenting its anti-submarine warfare capabilities and coastal surveillance.

Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi commissioned the ship at the Chennai Port.

This is the third of the eight vessels being built under the anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft project. The ship has indigenous, cutting-edge anti-submarine warfare weapons and sensor package, including the hull-mounted sonar Abhay, and is armed with lightweight torpedoes and ASW rockets.

The vessel is engineered to act as a "Dolphin Hunter," focused on detecting, tracking and neutralising enemy submarines in coastal areas.

INS Anjadip, the third vessel of the eight-ship Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC) project —*PTI*

At the ceremonial induction held at the Chennai Port, Admiral Tripathi formally commissioned the ship in the presence of senior Navy and government officials.

The 77-metre-long ship features a high-speed water-jet propulsion system, enabling it to achieve a top speed of 25 knots. Built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, Kolkata, INS Anjadip is a state-of-the-art vessel specifically designed to address the challenges of the littoral combat environment--coastal and shallow waters vital for the nation's security, the Navy said. The warship is also equipped for coastal surveillance, low-intensity maritime and search and rescue operations.

The induction of INS Anjadip, named after an island off the coast of Karwar, strengthens the Navy's capacity to safeguard India's maritime interests and the coasts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In his address, Admiral Tripathi said the Navy plans to induct 15 more ships this year, other than INS Anjadip. — *PTI*

Singer Zubeen's wife hails move for speedy trial

GUWAHATI, 27 FEB

The Assam government's decision to request a fast-track court to expedite the trial of singer Zubeen Garg's death was welcomed by his wife, Garima Saikia Garg. Garg died last September while swimming in Singapore during the 4th North East India Festival. She said, "We seek that the case is taken forward in a water-tight manner and the most stringent punishment is handed down to the accused."

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that the state Cabinet decided to seek a special court, following a request from Garg's family. The case involves seven accused, with the investigation conducted by the Assam Police's CID, which filed a charge-sheet. Garima added,

"We hope the judge considers this a special case," emphasising her desire for swift justice and that no bail be granted to the accused. She stated, "No one who loved Zubeen Garg will want it." — *PTI*

IFTAR AMID RUINS

Amid rubbles of destroyed buildings in Gaza City, people gather for iftar during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Iftar is the evening meal that breaks the daily fast observed during Ramadan —*PTI*

Once Jayalalithaa's trusted confidant, OPS joins DMK

Three-time AIADMK Chief Minister O Panneerselvam, who held top party positions before his expulsion in 2022, on Friday joined the DMK in the presence of its president and Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin in what is seen as a shot in the arm for the ruling party ahead of the elections.

A trusted confidant of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa, Ottakara Thevar Panneerselvam, popularly known as OPS, joined arch rival DMK, after unsuccessfully struggling for over three years to rejoin his parent outfit.

"Are you not embarrassed?" asked the AIADMK, highlighting OPS's meteoric rise in the party and underscored that he had even been the official signing authority to endorse the candidature of party nominees in elections.

75-year-old OPS, a prominent face of the influential Mukkulathor community, who had functioned as AIADMK Treasurer and also held the erstwhile top position of party coordinator, joined the DMK along with his son, P Ravindhranath Kumar and supporters.

OPS joining the DMK is expected to strengthen the ruling party more in southern districts where the Mukkulathor community wields solid electoral influence.

Incidentally, OPS, an MLA, is the last man in his camp to move out while his prominent supporters, including V Vaithilingam and PH Manoj Pandian, had already joined the DMK. Others, including JCD Prabhakar joined the TVK. Rajya Sabha MP R Dharmar is the only noted OPS supporter to accept the leadership of AIADMK Chief Edappadi K Palaniswami.

The legal battles OPS had initiated over his expulsion, targeting the AIADMK brass led by Palaniswami, did not succeed. EPS had, over the recent years, often labelled OPS as a 'betrayer.' EPS had often alleged that OPS supported the DMK by his actions and the former always questioned the latter's loyalty to the AIADMK. —PTI

Former chief minister O Panneerselvam welcomed into DMK by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Deputy Chief MinisterUdhayanidhi Stalin, and others in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, on Friday —*PTI*

Since last month, following a meeting between OPS and minister PK Sekar Babu, speculation has been rife that the ex-CM will join the DMK. Adding to the speculations, OPS supporter P Ayyappan days ago expressed confidence in the TN Assembly that Stalin-led government would be re-elected.

OPS himself said on February 20 that the DMK has the edge and it would win Assembly polls. Today, Sekar Babu, who was himself an ex-AIADMK leader accompanied OPS to DMK headquartes 'Anna Arivalayam'.

A party worker soon after the AIADMK's founding in 1972, he had been the chief minister thrice (2001-02, 2014-15 and 2016-17) and had held plum portfolios including finance, revenue and public works in his long stint in the governments led by the AIADMK.

A 5-time MLA, the first public office he held was that of Periyakulam Municipality chairman in Theni district in southern Tamil Nadu in 1996.

Beginning his life as a tea shop owner in Theni, he became the chief minister for the first time at the age of 40 years in 2001, when he became MLA for the first time, after Jayalalithaa had to step down as CM in the TANSI land deal case. Subsequently, he became the CM in 2014 after Jayalalithaa was convicted in a disproportionate assets case. Again, he was the CM after her death in 2016. He launched a 'Dharmayudham' in February 2017 alleging he was forced to quit as CM & eventually joined hands with Palaniswami-led faction and they together eased out Jayalalithaa's confidante VK Sasikala and her kin from the party.

Unassuming and modest, OPS had also briefly served as Leader of Opposition after DMK formed the government in 2006 and later, he had been the deputy LoP. In his stint in the government, he had also been the Leader of the House. After his expulsion, he floated the AIADMK Workers' Rights Retrieval Committee which in December 2025 was rechristened as All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Workers Rights Retrieval Kazhagam.

Speaking to reporters, Panneerselvam expressed happiness in joining the DMK and hit out at AIADMK general secretary Palaniswami as an "autocrat" and "arrogant"' who has created a situation of "no-victory" for the AIADMK at all times.

To questions related to the situation he faced in AIADMK following his expulsion, he said he was not concerned about the past and that he would abide by Stalin's diktat. Stalin understands people's needs and delivers welfare schemes to all sections of the people without any bias, he said and denied labelling DMK an evil force, a standard refrain used by AIADMK leaders to target party's archrival.

OPS joining the DMK has left several in disbelief with many wondering how a leader of his stature, who had been regarded as only next to 'Amma' Jayalalithaa in terms of stature and hierarchy during his hey days could switch over to DMK which relentlessly targeted Jayalalithaa, who gave him his identity & status. —*PTI*

SALAR ساڈا بنگلور

'Women, children suffer most in Afghan's conflict'

Member of the Afghan Parliament in exile, Mariam Solaiman khil, on Friday said that escalating Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict and political power struggles in the region have stripped Afghan women of their rights and security, warning that women and children are paying the heaviest price.

In an interview with ANI, Solaimankhil dismissed claims that recent airstrikes targeted only militants, asserting that civilians were the primary victims.

"It's women and children. We see the pictures. We see the videos. And it's always been women and children," she told ANI, alleging that violence continues to affect non-combatants both inside and beyond Afghanistan's borders.

She added," Even within what they call their jurisdiction. If we look at Balochistan and we look at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who are they killing? They're killing civilians. Who's in jail right now? It's Mahrang Baloch in Balochistan. It's Ali Wazir. These are the people who they're jailing, while they're still connected with people like Osama bin Laden."

She further accused elements within Pakistan of fostering extremist groups over the years, naming outfits such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Afghan Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, and describing the prevailing ideology as "incredibly dangerous" for the region.

She said, "They've created TTP. They've created the Afghan Taliban. They've created Lashkar-e-Taiba. I can't even begin to name the dozens of terrorist organisations that exist there. And it's incredibly dangerous because this ideology that they've created is not natural to our region. This is something that was made in Rawalpindi."

A girl, who was injured in the overnight cross-border fighting at Khar, in Bajaur, Afghanistan, on Friday —*PTI*

Responding to ANI on the impact of continued fighting, Solaimankhil said the trauma inflicted on women and children extends far beyond immediate casualties.

"We talk about the death toll, right? We talk about the injured, but then do we really talk about the victims that have to live with that trauma for the rest of their lives and how that affects their families and generations to come?" she said. "Surviving and living are two different things. They're not free. They're psychologically in prisons, and they're in fear at all times."

She said Afghan women are caught between armed conflict and restrictions imposed by the Taliban, with little access to justice or protection.

"There is no UN, there is no Amnesty, there is no human rights for Afghans. It's incredibly sad," she said.

On the rollback of freedoms for women, Solaimankhil said Afghan women historically enjoyed significant rights. "Our women had rights before anyone in the West did. I mean, we had the right to vote, we had the right to land, and we had the right to so many things before American and European women did. American and European women recently got these rights, and they could lose them any day," she said. "But our women had so much, and due to politics and war, this dirty game, it's been ripped away."

On whether Pakistan can be trusted to maintain peace, she was sharply critical, alleging that powerful actors had "made a business out of war."

However, she stressed that ordinary citizens, especially women, must lead the way towards peace.

"The good people of India, the women of India, and the women of Afghanistan need to get together, and we need to make our region into something we can be proud of. Not sitting there talking about terrorism. That's not who we are," she said. "I don't count on the UN, and I don't count on other countries, but I do count on the women of the world, especially in India, because I think we can be the bridges to peace."

Her comments come amid escalating tensions along the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan following airstrikes by Islamabad on Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia, with both countries reporting casualties and accusing each other of aggression. —*ANI*

Local residents stand next to a damaged car in the cross-border fighting between Pakistan and Afghan forces in the Behsud district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, on Friday—*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Nepal to hold 1st polls since deadly protests, with 3 vying to be PM

A former rapper who ran Kathmandu as a mayor. The young leader of Nepal's oldest political party. And a communist veteran politician hoping to return to power after being ousted in youth-led protests in which dozens were killed last year.

They are the three leading contenders as Nepal heads into a crucial nationwide election, the first since the protests led to the fall of former Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli's government in September.

Whoever prevails will become Nepal's 16th prime minister in less than two decades, underscoring the recurring political instability that has marked the Himalayan nation since the monarchy was abolished in 2008.

The protests in Nepal last year revealed the extent of young people's frustration with corruption and a lack of opportunity in the country, where around a fifth of young people are unemployed, but where the children of the political elite seem to enjoy luxury lifestyles and numerous advantages.

After public outrage led to the resignation of the government, millions of Nepalese voters are now gearing up to elect members of the House of Representatives, the powerful lower chamber of parliament.

The next prime minister will be chosen after securing a majority in the house.

Balendra Shah, widely known as Balen, is seen as front-runner after emerging as a popular figure during the campaign. He was elected mayor of the capital, Kathmandu, in 2022 and later left the post to become the National Independent Party's candidate for prime minister.

The 35-year-old Shah trained as a structural engineer and later gained modest fame as a rap artist, using his music to take on social issues and politics.

Dressed in his signature black attire and sunglasses, Shah has been touring the country. Supporters often line up to greet him and show support for him and his party.

Shah won the Kathmandu mayor's race as an independent, riding a wave of public anger toward traditional political parties. He drew praise for clearing illegal vendors, tackling the city's chronic garbage problem and pushing road expansions, but also faced criticism for ordering the demolition of homes and properties without adequate planning or notice.

A scene from Nepal's Gen Z protest; The three leading contenders for PM position — Balendra Shah, Gagan Thapa, and Khadga Prasad Oli —*WIKIPEDIA COMMONS*

- Whoever prevails will become Nepal's 16th prime minister in less than two decades, underscoring the recurring political instability that has marked the Himalayan nation since the monarchy was abolished in 2008.

"Our agenda is that the poor people who have no money in their pockets should get a full education. The poor people with empty pockets should get access to the health facilities. That is our agenda," he told his supporters in western Nepal last week.

Another contender is Gagan Thapa, the newly installed leader of the Nepali Congress, the country's oldest major political party, a liberal democratic party with close ties to India.

Long seen as a popular face within the Nepali Congress, Thapa, 49, had been held back by the party's senior leadership until earlier this year, when he mounted a rebellion and secured his election as party chief.

The Nepali Congress has remained a popular party, but was part of the last coalition government that was forced out by a youth revolt in September.

The youth-led protests were triggered by a social media ban before snowballing into a popular revolt against the government. Dozens were killed and hundreds injured when protesters attacked government buildings and police opened fire on them.

Thapa says his first priority would be to rid Nepal of corruption within five years and make the government fully accountable to the public.

The other contender for the post is Khadga Prasad Oli, the controversial but strong communist leader who led the coalition government that was forced out of power last year.

He is blamed by many for the deaths in the violent protests that ousted him.

Despite criticism of his handling last year's protests, Oli still commands support within the Communist Party and among many of its supporters.

Oli has consistently argued that steady policies and politics are essential for Nepal, warning that the economy needs stability to develop.

Nepal is located between Asian giants India and China, and both countries have shown keen interest in having influence in their smaller neighbour.

Thapa's party is traditionally closer to India while Oli's communist groups are seen as more friendly to China. —*PTI*

Churchill statue vandalised with 'free Palestine'

LONDON, 27 FEB

London police said they caught a vandal red-handed — or at least with red paint — after he defaced a statue Friday of former British prime minister Winston Churchill in central London with pro-Palestinian graffiti. The 38-year-old suspect was arrested on suspicion of racially aggravated criminal damage for allegedly painting "Zionist war criminal" on the plinth beneath the 12-foot statute of Churchill leaning on a cane that faces Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, the Metropolitan Police reported. "Stop the Genocide" and "Free Palestine" were also painted in red on the bronze sculpture. —PTI

19 Chinese officers removed before annual meeting

BEIJING, 27 FEB

China's legislature has dismissed 19 members, including nine military officers, one week ahead of the start of its annual meeting. The announcement did not state the reason behind the removals, though they are generally tied to corruption investigations. An anti-corruption campaign was launched by Chinese leader Xi Jinping over a decade ago. The military has been targeted in recent years, including the removal of its top general last month, as Xi seeks to reform and modernize the armed forces. The dismissals aren't likely to have a major impact on the meeting of the National People's Congress. —*PTI*

Viral trend sees Argentine youth identify as animals

BUENOS AIRES, 27 FEB

On Sunday, a Buenos Aires plaza became a playground for "therians," teenagers who identify mentally or spiritually with animals. Sofia wore a lifelike beagle mask, running on all fours, while 15-year-old Aguara leapt through an obstacle course like a Belgian Malinois. Others, dressed as cats and foxes, perched in trees, keeping their distance from onlookers. The trend has surged on TikTok in Argentina, where #therian has over 2 million posts. Aguara, who counts her age in dog years, says she is otherwise a normal teenager and leads her "pack" of followers. Psychologist Debora Pedace said the phenomenon is generally symbolic, becoming concerning only if someone fully assumes an animal role, risking self-harm or harming others. —*PTI*

US citizens killed in Cuba boat shooting

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

At least one American citizen was shot dead and another injured by Cuban officials intercepting a speedboat off its coast on Wednesday, a US official has said. Border guards shot dead four people and injured another six aboard the Florida-registered speedboat. Cuba accused the people on the boat of planning "an infiltration with terrorist aims," claiming they opened fire first. A third person was on a US K-1 visa. The boat's owner alleged the vessel had been stolen by an employee. Washington was investigating the incident. However, Cuban authorities had said all 10 were Cuban nationals residing in the US. Another person, who had confessed to being involved in the alleged plot has been arrested. -*AGENCIES*

PAK GOES TO WAR WITH AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan airstrikes killed at least 270 Taliban fighters to 'avenge' a recent attack

Taliban fighters look up while manning an armed pickup truck at the Afghan side of the Ghulam Khan crossing with Pakistan in Khost province, Afghanistan —*PTI*

ISLAMABAD, 27 FEB

Pakistan on Friday said it was in an "open war" with Afghanistan after its forces killed more than 270 Taliban fighters and injured over 400 others in airstrikes in response to what Islamabad described as the cross-border attack by the Afghan Taliban.

Afghanistan's Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that Afghan forces killed 55 Pakistani soldiers and targeted "important military objectives" inside Pakistan.

The Afghan Taliban attacked several check posts along the border late Thursday, apparently to avenge the air strikes carried out by Pakistan in Afghanistan's border areas on Sunday. Pakistan responded by hitting targets in Kabul, Kandahar and Paktia under 'Operation Ghazab lil Haq' early on Friday.

The 2,611-km border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is known as the Durand Line, which Kabul has not formally recognised.

"Our patience has run out. Now there is an open war between us...Now it will be 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar'. Pakistan's army did not come from across the seas. We are your neighbours; we know your ins and outs," Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif posted on X. 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar' refers to a song associated with the Sindhi sufi saint Lal Shehbaz Qalandar.

It means "every breath is ecstasy of Qalandar', but in common parlance, it refers to acting impulsively without considering the consequences.

Shehbaz said Pakistan destroyed 73 Afghan posts and captured 18. He said at least 115 tanks, armoured personnel carriers and artillery pieces were destroyed.

He said the Afghan Taliban Corps Headquarters, Brigade Headquarters, Battalion Headquarters, and weapon depots were also destroyed in 22 places in Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia, Khost, Paktika, and Laghman.

Taliban government spokesman Mujahid said any "malicious act" by Pakistan would be answered "in Islamabad." He that Afghanistan seeks peaceful relations with neighbours.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last year signed a joint defence agreement, pledging to come to the aid of each other in case of attacks by a third country.

President Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan would not compromise on peace and territorial integrity.

"Our armed forces' response is comprehensive and decisive. Those who mistake our peace for weakness will face a strong response — and no one will be beyond reach," Zardari stated. —PTI

> **Our good relations with India are not directed against Pakistan... The Emirate has never been under the control of any country**
>
> - Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman

> **The Pakistani armed forces are equipped with effective defence strategies and are fully capable of dealing with any internal or external challenge**
>
> -Khawaja Asif, Pak Defence Minister

CHINA, RUSSIA PUSH FOR CEASEFIRE

China called on Pakistan and Afghanistan to work out a ceasefire. The de-escalation serves the fundamental interests of the two countries and peoples, and will help uphold peace and stability in the region, she said. China maintains close ties with Pakistan and Afghanistan through a tripartite mechanism. Similarly, Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement, "There are casualties on both sides. We call on our friendly countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to abandon this dangerous confrontation and return to the negotiating table to resolve all differences through diplomatic means."

PAKISTAN OUTGUNS AFGHANISTAN
Pakistan massively outguns Afghanistan, but Kabul is known as the 'Graveyard of Empires' for a reason. Afghanistan has previously withheld Russian, British and American attacks. Here's a breakdown of their military:
Pakistan
Afghanistan
6,60,000
Troops
1,72,000
Tanks, armoured vehicles
6,000 armoured fighting vehicles and 4,600 artillery heads.
Small number of armoured vehicles dating back to Soviet era.
Air
465 combat aircraft and 260 helicopters. These include F15 and Chinese made JF-17.
No fighter jets and only a small number of ageing aircrafts and helicopters.
Nuke power
Pakistan is a nuclear armed state. It has at least 170 warheads.
Afghanistan has 0 nuclear capabilities.
DESIGNED BY: BOOPATHY
*Global Firepower
Allies
Pakistan has significant diplomatic and military ties with China. It has also signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement or 'Muslim-NATO' pact with Saudi Arabia, suggesting that an attack on one could force the other into action. Turkey and Gulf nations are in talks to join the deal.Afghanistan has been diplomatically isolated since the Taliban took over, but India recently opened an embassy in Kabul.

In blow to Starmer, UK Green Party wins bypolls

LONDON, 27 FEB

The Green Party won a special parliamentary election in England on Friday, in a blow to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, whose center-left Labour Party was relegated to third place.

Green candidate Hannah Spencer was declared winner of the contest in Gorton and Denton with 14,980 votes. Matthew Goodwin of hard-right party Reform UK got 10,578 votes. Labour candidate Angeliki Stogia received 9,364.

The result illustrates the increasingly fragmented political landscape in Britain, which was dominated for decades by the Labour and Conservative parties. The Gorton and Denton constituency in Greater Manchester elected Labour lawmakers for almost all of the last century, but Starmer's government has seen its popularity plunge since it won office in July 2024.

"I will fight for you," said Spencer, a local councilor and plumber, told her constituents in her victory speech.

The victory brings the environmentalist party's total to five seats in the 650-seat House of Commons. Labour holds 404 Commons seats, while Reform holds eight. —PTI

US-Iran fail to reach deal as talks end

TEHRAN/WASHINGTON/ BEIRUT, 27 FEB

Indirect talks between Iranian and US officials concluded in Geneva on Thursday. Although the mediator, Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, reported "significant progress," neither side showed a willingness to make concessions to avoid war.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was reported to have met US envoy Steve Witkoff, according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

UN watchdog, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi, also attended to handle nuclear monitoring under any potential deal.

While Iranian officials haven't shared full details, their proposals reportedly include diluting 60 per cent enriched uranium and keeping it within the country. In exchange, Tehran seeks US economic opportunities involving oil, gas, and aircraft purchases.

However, the two sides remain divided, with Washington insisting it will not allow any nuclear enrichment on Iranian soil.

Further technical talks will be held next week in Vienna.

US TO BLOCK IRAN-LINKED SWISS BANK

The US is moving to sever a small Swiss bank from access to the US financial system for its alleged support for Iranian a n d

Crude oil prices could surge to as high as $110 per barrel if Iran's oil supply and the Strait of Hormuz face disruption

IRANIAN AGENTS BLOCKED PROTESTERS' MEDICAL CARE

During last month's crackdown, armed, plainclothes security agents swarmed Iranian hospitals to quash dissent. One doctor told AP News that agents blocked wounded protesters with rifles, while others monitored care, intimidated staff, and seized both the living and the dead. —*Agencies*

Mamdani, Don talk NY housing investment

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani gives a mock newspaper to POTUS reading, 'Trump to City: Lets Build', it was inspired by 1975 paper —*x*

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani presented President Donald Trump with a mock newspaper in a Thursday White House to discuss New York housing investments.

Mamdani's proposal is to build 12,000 homes in Queens. Funded by over USD 21 billion in federal grants, creating 30,000 jobs, making it the city's largest housing investment in 50 years.

MAMDANI ASKS TRUMP TO RELEASE STUDENT

Mamdani also pressed Trump to release Ellie Aghayeva, a Columbia University student from Azerbaijan, detained by ICE. The agents allegedly accessed the campus, claiming they were searching for a "missing person".

Following their meeting, Trump called Mamdani to pledge Aghayeva's release. Mamdani then urged Chief of Staff Susie Wiles to assist four other students targeted by federal authorities. —*PTI*

US offers $10M for Mexico cartel

The US State Department is offering $10 million—$5 million per brother—for information on Mexico's cartel leaders René and Alfonso Arzate Garcíar. This follows the Mexican army's killing of El Mencho, Jalisco Cartel head.

EU probes Epstein & Mandelson ties

BRUSSELS, 27 FEB

The EU has ordered its anti-fraud office to investigate Peter Mandelson, the former British ambassador to the US, over his ties to late sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein while serving as Brussels' trade representative.

Mandelson's ties to Epstein have already threatened the leadership of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who appointed the veteran statesman to the diplomatic post despite warnings about his friendship with the disgraced financier.

Before Brexit wrenched the UK from the EU, Mandelson served as the bloc's Commissioner for Trade from November 2004 to October 2008. Documents show he remained in contact with Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell before, during, and after his tenure. —*PTI*

171 BODIES FOUND IN CONGO MASS GRAVES

KINSHASA, 27 FEB

Congolese authorities and a civil society group said Thursday that mass graves were found in part of eastern Congo that the M23 rebel group has recently withdrawn from.

The fighting in the region escalated despite a US-mediated peace deal.

The Governor of South-Kivu province, Jacques Purusi, said authorities found two mass graves with at least 171 dead bodies in the Kiromoni and Kavimvira neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the eastern city of Uvira.

While 30 bodies were found in Kiromoni, 141 bodies have been recovered in the Kavimvira neighbourhood.

Information gathered so far indicates that the victims were killed by M23 rebels, said Yves Ramadhani, the group's vice president.

The Governor and the civil society group alleged that the rebels killed the individuals because they suspected them of belonging to the Congolese army or a pro-government militia. —*PTI*

Congolese authorities said on Thursday that mass graves were found in parts of eastern Congo —*ANI*

DEPARTMENT OF WAR

US military won't let Anthropic dictate terms, vows to use its AI

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

The Pentagon's top spokesman said that the military wants to use Anthropic's artificial intelligence (AI) technology in legal ways and will not let the company dictate any limits ahead of a Friday deadline to agree to its demands.

Pentagon "has no interest in using AI to conduct mass surveillance of Americans (which is illegal) nor do we want to use AI to develop autonomous weapons that operate without human involvement," Sean Parnell said on Thursday.

The Department of Defence had threatened to cancel a USD 200m contract if Anthropic refused to agree to remove safeguards, as Defence Secretary **Pete Hegseth** and Anthropic CEO **Dario Amodei** met on Tuesday.

The government also threatened to designate Anthropic as a supply chain risk or invoke the Cold War-era law Defence Production Act to give the military more sweeping authority to use Anthropic's products, even if the firm doesn't approve.

Parnell said Anthropic has "until 5:01 PM on Friday to make their decision."

'CEO HAS A GOD COMPLEX'

US Under Secretary of War Emil Michael accused Amodei of attempting to control military decision-making while calling him a "liar" who has a "God complex" in a post on X.

The remarks come after Amodei, in a statement on Thursday, said that the firm would not support certain uses of AI, including mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons, citing concerns about democratic values and the current reliability of frontier AI systems. "The Department of War has stated they will only contract with AI companies who accede to 'any lawful use' and remove safeguards," Amodei said in a statement. "Regardless, these threats do not change our position: we cannot in good conscience accede to their request."

DON'T CROSS REDLINES: GOOGLE, OPEN AI STAFF

Hundreds of Google and Open AI staff signed a public letter to Jeff Dean, tChief Scientist of the Google's AI division DeepMind, urging the company to stop a deal which crosses "red lines" in the "face of pressure from the Department of War" —*Agencies*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold rises to Rs 1.64 lakh/10g; Silver declines

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Gold prices climbed Rs 1,800 to Rs 1,64,700 per 10g in the national capital on Friday, driven by fresh buying by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 1,62,900 per 10g on Thursday. However, silver extended losses for the second consecutive day, declining Rs 2,500, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 2,68,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of Rs 2,70,500 per kg, as per the association. In the international market, spot silver gained $1.42, or 1.6 per cent, to $89.72 per ounce; however, gold was trading marginally lower at $5,172.17 per ounce. "Spot gold is trading steady at $5,180 as traders wait for further information and clarity on the US-Iran nuclear deal," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities and Currencies, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said. —*PTI*

Rupee falls by 8P, settles at 90.99 against USD

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

The rupee declined 8 paise to settle at 90.99 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday weighed down by a sharp rise in global crude oil prices amid geopolitical uncertainties. FII outflows and a fall in the domestic equity markets further pressured the local unit, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.91 and moved in a narrow range of 90.91-91.06 before settling at 90.99 (provisional), down 8 paise from its previous close. The rupee settled on a flat note at 90.91 against the US dollar on Thursday. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent lower at 97.74. —*PTI*

Apple opens 2nd Mumbai store, 6th in India

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Apple has opened its second store in Mumbai and sixth in India, located at Sky City Mall in Borivali. The new store offers the full range of Apple products, including the iPhone 17 family, iPhone Air, Apple Watch Ultra 3, Series 11, and Mac and iPad models with M5 chips. Customers can explore dedicated counters for music systems, accessories, and gaming, with over 70 staff providing expert support. Retail services like Trade In, financing, and Personal Setup are available, along with Apple Pickup. The store operates on 100 per cent renewable energy and is carbon neutral. This opening builds on Apple's retail expansion in India, which started in 2023, and its manufacturing growth under the PLI scheme. —*ANI*

Netflix withdraws from Warner Bros takeover deal

Paramount's buyout of Warner will reshape Hollywood

NEW YORK, 27 FEB

PHOTO: AI

Netflix is walking away from its offer to buy Warner Bros Discovery's studio and streaming business, in a stunning move that effectively puts Paramount in a position to take over its storied Hollywood rival.

On Thursday, Warner's board announced that Skydance-owned Paramount's latest offer to buy the entire company for USD 31 per share was superior to the agreement it had previously struck with Netflix.

Warner gave Netflix four business days to come up with a counteroffer — but Netflix instead responded less than two hours later, declining to raise its proposal. It said the new price it would have to pay made the deal "no longer financially attractive".

"We believe we would have been strong stewards of Warner Bros' iconic brands," Netflix's co-CEOs Ted Sarandos and Greg Peters said in a joint statement. "But this transaction was always a nice-to-have at the right price, not a must-have at any price."

A Paramount buyout of Warner Bros Discovery would reshape Hollywood and the wider media landscape. And unlike Netflix — which was only eyeing Warner's studio and streaming business — Paramount wants the entire company. That means HBO Max, cult-favourite titles like "Harry Potter" and even CNN could soon find themselves under the same roof as Paramount's CBS, "Top Gun" and the Paramount+ streaming service.

Netflix's decision to walk away on Thursday marks the latest development in a monthslong, messy corporate battle over Warner's future.

Warner had repeatedly backed the deal it struck with Netflix since December right up until Thursday evening, when its board continued to recommend Netflix even while calling Paramount's bid valued at about USD 111 billion, including debt, "superior".

Netflix had previously put a USD 27.75 per share offer on the table for Warner's studio and streaming business, totalling nearly USD 83 billion including debt. —*PTI*

2,528 STOCKS DECLINE

Market crash wipes out ₹4.98L cr from investors' wealth

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Investors' wealth was eroded by Rs 4.98 lakh crore on Friday as markets faced heavy drubbing, with the Sensex falling over 1 per cent, due to fresh foreign fund outflows and subdued global trends amid rising geopolitical risks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 961.42 points or 1.17 per cent to settle at 81,287.19. During the day, it dropped 1,089.46 points or 1.32 per cent to 81,159.15.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 4,98,603.42 crore to Rs 4,63,50,671.27 crore (USD 5.10 trillion) in a single day.

"Domestically, a risk-off tone prevails as the earnings season winds down and global macro factors take precedence," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

From the Sensex pack, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, InterGlobe Aviation and Maruti were among the major laggards.

HCL Tech, Trent, Infosys, Eternal and NTPC were the gainers.

Among sectoral indices, realty dropped 2.25 per cent, telecommunication (1.83 per cent), auto (1.81 per cent), metal (1.57 per cent), commodities (1.56 per cent), FMCG (1.52 per cent) and financial services (1.50 per cent).

IT and BSE Focused IT were the only gainers.

The BSE smallcap select index declined 0.84 per cent and midcap select index dipped 0.71 per cent.

A total of 2,528 stocks declined, while 1,660 advanced and 181 remained unchanged on the BSE. —*PTI*

WCL discovers 8 rare earth elements in 6 Maharashtra mines

NAGPUR, 27 FEB

Western Coalfields Limited (WCL), headquartered in Nagpur, has made a significant breakthrough in mineral exploration, discovering eight strategic minerals across its six mines in Maharashtra.

An official confirmed that these minerals were identified in mines including Adasa UG, Makardhokra-III, Durgapur OC, Gauri-Pauni, Mungoli-Nirguda, and Yekona I & II.

The analysis revealed economically important concentrations of rare earth elements (REEs) and critical minerals such as Potash (K), Tellurium (Te), Titanium (Ti), Lanthanum (La), Cerium (Ce), Rhenium (Re), Selenium (Se), and Zirconium (Zr). Potash has potential for fertiliser and agro-chemical applications; Tellurium is essential for solar cells, semiconductors, and thermoelectric devices. Titanium supports aerospace, defence, and pigment industries; Lanthanum and Cerium are vital for EV motors, magnets, catalysts, and electronics; Rhenium is used in superalloys and jet engines; Selenium in electronics and renewable energy; Zirconium in nuclear and aerospace.

These findings suggest that waste material from WCL's mining activities contains high-value minerals, transforming waste into potential revenue. WCL's future plans include detailed resource estimation, feasibility studies, pilot plants, and partnerships to develop REE extraction, positioning itself as a leader in India's critical mineral sector. —*PTI*

'FOR CLOSER COLLAB'

Modi urges India Inc to step up investment, innovation

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** on Friday urged the Indian industry to step up investment and innovation, saying the government has laid the groundwork through aggressive capital spending and by creating a conducive policy environment in successive Budgets, and that it is now time for the private sector to drive the next phase of globally competitive growth.

Addressing the first post-Budget webinar on 'Technology, Reforms and Finance for Viksit Bharat', Modi said public capital expenditure has risen from Rs 2 lakh crore 11 years ago to over Rs 12 lakh crore in the Union Budget 2026-27, laying a strong foundation for expansion.

The higher allocation, he said, signals the private sector to invest with renewed vigour and leverage Budget announcements for 2026-27.

"India Inc should come forward with fresh investment and innovation. Financial institutions and analysts should help design practical solutions and improve market confidence," he said, calling for closer collaboration between government, industry, and knowledge partners to ensure reforms translate into tangible outcomes.

"We need greater participation in infrastructure and innovation in financial models... we must strengthen project sanction methodologies and improve the quality of appraisal," he said.

Over the past decade, the government has anchored India's growth strategy around record capital expenditure, sharply scaling up spending on highways, railways, ports, airports, digital infrastructure and energy networks to crowd in private investment and lift medium-term productivity. However, the private sector is yet to unleash the so-called animal spirit. —*PTI*

India's forex reserves drop to $723.60 billion

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

India's forex reserves dropped by $2.119 billion to $723.608 billion during the week ended February 20, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had jumped by $8.663 billion to a new all-time high of $725.727 billion.

For the week ended February 20, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by $1.039 billion to $572.564 billion, the data released by the central bank showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves. The Special Drawing Rights were down by $84 million to $18.84 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by $18 million to $4.716 billion in the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data. —*PTI*

Scindia announces India's entry into global 6G standard-setting

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Union Communications Minister **Jyotiraditya Scindia** announced India's historic entry into the global 6G standard-setting table at the News18 Rising Bharat Summit. He highlighted India's rapid 5G expansion, noting the country achieved the fastest 5G rollout worldwide, connecting 99.9 per cent of districts in 22 months, with 40 crore people already on 5G.

Scindia stated, the Bharat 6G Alliance has grown from 15 to over 100 members, including companies across the entire value chain, and India has partnered with 30 countries on 6G alliances. For the first time, India is working directly with the ITU and 3GPP to define 6G's technical DNA. He added, India's vision for 6G focuses on inclusivity, with a research paper on "Ubiquitous Connectivity" accepted into the international framework.

India aims for a 10 per cent share of global 6G patents and has established research corridors with over 30 nations. The government is also prioritising user safety through SIM-to-app binding to prevent digital fraud. —*PTI*

BoB to raise `10,000 cr via bonds

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

State-owned lender Bank of Baroda plans to raise up to Rs 10,000 crore through issuance of green infrastructure bonds on 4 March.

The base issue size is Rs 5,000 crore, with a green shoe option to retain oversubscription of up to Rs 5,000 crore, taking the total issue size to Rs 10,000 crore, market sources said.

Bonds will have a tenor of seven years and are scheduled to mature on 5 March, 2033. The pay-in and allotment date is 5 March, 2026. Pay in is the date when exchange of bonds and money takes place between issuer and investor.

The bidding for the bond issue will take place between 11:00 am and 12:00 pm on 4 March on the Electronic Book Provider (EBP) platform of the National Stock Exchange of India.

Bonds have been rated 'AAA' with 'Stable' by CARE Ratings and ICRA.

The bonds will carry annual interest payments and will be allocated on a uniform yield basis through a closed bidding process. —*PTI*

Fintech firm Block lays off 4,000 staff for AI gains

BANGKOK, 27 FEB

Shares in the financial technology company Block soared more than 20 percent in premarket trading Friday after its CEO announced it was laying off more than 4,000 of its 10,000 plus employees, reconfiguring to capitalize on its use of artificial intelligence.

"The core thesis is simple. Intelligence tools have changed what it means to build and run a company," Jack Dorsey said in a letter to shareholders in Block, the parent company to online payment platforms such as Square and Cash App. "A significantly smaller team, using the tools we're building, can do more and do it better," he said.

Dorsey's comments explicitly naming AI as a key driver behind the move were also posted on X, or Twitter, a company he co-founded. The assertion that the job cuts will add to Block's profitability and efficiency led investors to jump in and buy, analysts said.

Block's shares gained 5 percent Thursday to $54.53, before it reported its earnings. They shot up to nearly $69 in afterhours trading. The mobile payments services provider reported its fourth quarter gross profit jumped 24 percent from a year earlier. —*PTI*

TATA TRUSTS ROW

Chandrasekaran's reappointment delay raises questions on tenure resolution

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The deferral of Natarajan Chandrasekaran's re-appointment for a third term as Chairman of Tata Sons has raised questions over a unanimous resolution passed last year by trustees of Tata Trusts recommending an extension of his tenure, according to group observers.

At a board meeting on Tuesday, Tata Sons deferred a decision on Chandrasekaran's continuation, signalling potential differences within the holding company of the salt-to-software conglomerate.

Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata is learnt to have set several conditions for Chandrasekaran's re-appointment, leading to the postponement. He reportedly raised concerns over losses in certain group companies, including Air India, and flagged risks associated with heavy capital expenditure in semiconductor and battery ventures. He is also understood to have sought assurances that Tata Sons would not pursue a stock market listing.

"It definitely raises questions on the validity of the unanimous resolution passed by the trustees of Tata Trusts last year recommending a third term for Chandrasekaran," a person familiar with the matter said, adding, "Can a nominated director of Tata Trusts go against the unanimous decision of the trustees?"

Natarajan Chandrasekaran –*PTI*

- At a board meeting on Tuesday, Tata Sons deferred a decision on Chandrasekaran's continuation, signalling potential differences within the holding company of the salt-to-software conglomerate.

Tata Trusts did not respond to queries on whether the resolution had been revoked or whether a nominee director on the Tata Sons board could unilaterally diverge from the trustees' decision.

However, a source with direct knowledge of the matter said the resolution "clearly stands" and was taken unanimously after due deliberation.

"What Noel Tata did was within his capacity as a director of Tata Sons and was not necessarily against the resolution of the trustees. The resolution will be implemented in due course," the source said.

Tata Trusts collectively hold a majority 66 per cent stake in Tata Sons, which controls the over USD 180 billion Tata Group with interests spanning automobiles, steel, software, aviation and emerging sectors such as semiconductors.

Last year, infighting in Tata Trusts had reached the government, with the top brass of the Tata group, including Noel Tata and Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran, meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Subsequently, government told the trusts to resolve the issue amicably and not let their differences spill into public, considering the significance of the Tata Group on India's economy.

The cancellation of the meeting came over two months after the failure of the first attempt to induct Neville Tata on the board of SRTT, which holds 23.6 per cent in Tata Sons, the promoter holding firm of the over USD 180 billion Tata Group. —*PTI*

Ranji Trophy: J&K close in on historic title triumph

Auqib and Iqbal place J&K in a prime position

HUBBALLI, 27 FEB

A by-the-book pacer, Auqib Nabi, and an unorthodox opener, Qamran Iqbal, blended their skills to place Jammu and Kashmir in a prime position to lift their maiden Ranji Trophy title against Karnataka on the penultimate day of the five-day final here on Friday.

Iqbal (94 not out) struck his seventh first-class fifty as Jammu and Kashmir reached 186 for four at stumps in their second innings, for an overall lead of 477 runs.

In the earlier part of the day, Nabi took his seventh five-wicket haul (5/54) of the season as J&K bowled out Karnataka for 293, grabbing an innings lead of 291 runs.

Jammu and Kashmir's Qamran Iqbal plays a shot on day four of the final cricket match between Karnataka and Jammu and Kashmir -PTI

Auqib Nabi -PTI

Karnataka's first innings revolved around a valiant 160 off 266 balls by former skipper Mayank Agarwal, but in the context of the match, the knock remained a rather insignificant one.

Nabi was the primary reason behind confining Agarwa's fine hundred to the shades. The J&K pacer was in his elements once Karnataka resumed from overnight 220 for five.

Overhauling J&K's 584 was out of bounds, but Karnataka's realistic hope was to whittle down the deficit as much as possible and then try to chase a reasonable target in the fourth innings.

Agarwal and Kruthik Krishna (36) seemed to be on course while adding over 80 runs for the sixth wicket.

But J&K's saviour returned when the second new ball was taken.

But before Nabi could deal the biggest blow, Sahil Lotra removed Kruthik, trapping the wicket-keeper batter's leg, even though the ball might have made slight contact with the bat.

Left-arm pacer Sunil Kumar ousted Vidyadhar Patil as J&K maintained their upper hand. But Nabi snuffed out any last vestiges of hope Karnataka entertained, pinging Agarwal's pads, and the DRS confirmed the hosts' worst fears. They started well too, reducing the opposition to 11 for two, but Iqbal added 61 runs for the third wicket with captain Paras Dogra and then milked 73 for the fourth wicket with Abdul Samad as J&K sped away. Iqbal's batting was quite entertaining as he often used the space inside the crease to give himself room, carting bowlers for boundaries.

Jammu & Kashmir 584 and 186 for 4 (Qamran 94*, Samad 32, Prasidh 2-42) lead Karnataka 293 (Mayank 160, Kruthik 36, Nabi 5-54, Sunil 2-51) by 477 runs. —*PTI*

Ganguly Advocates for Nabi's Selection for England Tour

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly on Friday showered praise on Jammu and Kashmir for their exploits against Karnataka in their maiden Ranji Trophy final, picking out pacer Auqib Nabi as a player who deserves to represent the country.

Nabi has claimed 60 wickets so far in this Ranji season, including five for 54 against Karnataka in the first innings of the final. Nabi's exploits put J&K in control as they bowled out the eight-time winners Karnataka for 293 in 93.3 overs after posting a massive 584 in Hubballi.

"J&K has shown the world what effort and intent can do .They have made that region so proud of them. Tough environment makes tough people," Ganguly wrote on 'X'. "Aqib Nabi on his way to national colours .. England is the place to start in the summer," (sic) he added, tagging the BCCI, senior men's selection committee chairman Ajit Agarkar, and BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia. Resuming Day 4 at 220 for five, Karnataka lost their last five wickets for 73 runs, with Nabi dismissing their top batter, Mayank Agarwal (160)

TO SEAL A SEMI-SPOT

Pak need big win over SL

PALLEKELE, 27 FEB

Pakistan will need a commanding win over already-eliminated Sri Lanka and a favour from England to keep their semifinal hopes alive in the T20 World Cup when they play their final Super 8 match here on Saturday.

Co-hosts Sri Lanka have already crashed out of the semifinal race after Super 8 defeats to England and New Zealand, while England have sealed their place in the last four.

Pakistan, placed third in the table, is locked in a battle with New Zealand for the second and final berth, but the Kiwis are in a far stronger position than Agha's side.

With three points and a vastly superior net run rate of 3.050, New Zealand are in pole position compared to Pakistan's solitary point from two matches and a negative NRR of -0.461.

But all hope is not lost for Pakistan, who can still qualify if England thrash New Zealand by a huge margin on Friday and Agha's men, in turn, beat Sri Lanka just as comprehensively.

However, it would be a big ask for Pakistan's batters and bowlers to put together a clinical show, having largely misfired in the tournament.

Sahibzada Farhan stands head and shoulders above the rest with 283 runs at 70.75, including one century and two fifties, at a strike rate of 158.10.

While skipper Agha (44 runs), Saim Ayub (70) and star batter Babar Azam (91) have only disappointed, Pakistan will have their hopes pinned on the dangerous Fakhar Zaman to deliver the goods.

Usman Tariq's 10 wickets have offered Pakistan some hope in the bowling department, along with Shaheen Shah Afridi showing signs of form against England, albeit in a game he could not turn around on his own.

For Sri Lanka, it will be imperative to give their passionate fans a win in their final appearance in the tournament. The last time Sri Lanka were co-hosts, they had finished as runner-up in 2011.

Dasun Shanaka's side began impressively and almost added their name among title favourites when they pulverised Australia in the group stage. But since that win, Sri Lanka have lost three games on the trot against Zimbabwe, England and New Zealand to fizzle out.

Pathum Nissanka's inspired century against Australia now feels like a distant memory as Sri Lanka stand battered not only by the string of defeats marked by underwhelming cricket all round. The match starts at 7:00 pm IST. —*PTI*

Prague Chess Festival: Gukesh held by Nodirbek Yakubboev

PRAGUE, 27 FEB

World Champion D Gukesh played out another draw with Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan, while defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram pulled a rabbit out of the hat to beat Hans Moke Niemann of the United States in the second round of the Masters section of the Prague International Chess Festival here.

Following a draw with Niemann, Gukesh's second white game also did not yield much as Yakubboev seemed well-armed in the Queen's Gambit Declined. After a couple of trades, the position

looked level, and Yakubboev uncorked a rook sacrifice to force a repetition of the position. Aravindh continued with his newfound preference for the Philidor Defence, while Niemann seized the early initiative with the white pieces. The American, however, ran short of time at a critical juncture and paid heavily, just when the analytical engines were evaluating his position as winning.

Aravindh was quick to capitalise on his chances and soon transitioned into a winning endgame. After a heartbreaking first-round loss to Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, this was a welcome victory for the Chennai-based player.

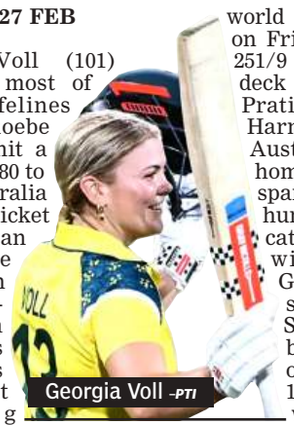
With seven rounds still to come, Abdusattorov, Yakubboev, and local hopeful David Navara emerged as the co-leaders on 1.5 points apiece, and the trio is followed by Gukesh, Aravindh, van Foreest, and Guijarro, a half point behind. —*PTI*

CLINCH ODI SERIES 2-0

Georgia Voll, Phoebe fire Australia to 5-wicket win vs India

HOBART, 27 FEB

Georgia Voll (101) made the most of three lifelines while Phoebe Litchfield hit a belligerent 80 to power Australia to a five-wicket win and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series against reigning world champions India here on Friday.After India posted 251/9 on a batting-friendly deck following fifties from Pratika Rawal (52) and Harmanpreet Kaur (54), Australia batters romped home with 13.5 overs to spare.Voll completed her hundred after a dropped catch down the leg by wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh allowed her to scamper for a single. She was dropped twice before reaching her second ODI ton.Voll added 119 runs for the second wicket with Litchfield to put Australia on track for a win after the hosts had lost the T20Is 1-2 earlier.



Georgia Voll -PTI

Phoebe Litchfield -PTI

Australia 252 for 5 (Voll 101, Litchfield 80) beat India 251 for 9 (Harmanpreet 54, Rawal 52) by five wickets. —*PTI*

Rei seals Jamshedpur's 2-1 comeback win against EB

KOLKATA, 27 FEB

A late strike from substitute Rei Tachikawa completed a dramatic turnaround as Jamshedpur FC defeated East Bengal 2-1 in an Indian Super League match at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan here on Friday.

The visitors registered their third consecutive victory to move provisionally to the top of the table with nine points from three matches, while East Bengal remained on six points following their first defeat of the campaign.

East Bengal head coach Óscar Bruzón made one change to his starting line-up, bringing in Anton Søjberg in place of Nandha Kumar. Jamshedpur FC head coach

Rei Tachikawa -PTI

Owen Coyle also made a solitary change, handing Vincy Barretto a start ahead of Ritwik Kumar Das.

The contest began at a high tempo with both sides looking to assert early control.

East Bengal left-back Jay Gupta came close in the third minute, heading over from a Miguel Figueira delivery following a set-piece.

Nottingham clinch Europa League round of 16 spot

LONDON, 27 FEB

Nottingham Forest held off a Fenerbahce fightback to qualify for the last 16 of the Europa League with a 4-2 win on aggregate despite losing Thursday's second leg, while Celtic exited after coming up short against Stuttgart.

Forest led 3-0 from the first leg in Turkey, but Kerem Akturkoglu brought Fenerbahce back into the tie with goals in each half, the second from the penalty spot after a foul by Jair Cunha.

Callum Hudson-Odoi eased the growing anxiety inside the City Ground when he pulled one back for Forest on 68 minutes, with the Premier League side taking their place in Friday's draw for the later rounds despite a 2-1 home defeat.

Nottingham Forest's Callum Hudson-Odoi celebrates his goal -PTI

Forest, who are fighting for their top-flight survival under new boss Vitor Pereira, will face Real Betis or Danish side Midtjylland in the last 16. Celtic bowed out of Europe after losing 4-2 on aggregate to Stuttgart despite a 1-0 away win in the second leg of their knockout phase play-off tie. After last week's 4-1 defeat in Glasgow left Martin O'Neill's side facing a three-goal deficit, they made the ideal start to the second leg, with Luke McCowan finding the net inside the opening minute. But Celtic could make no further inroads and had to settle for the consolation of the club's first-ever win in Germany.

Their exit left the Scottish champions still seeking a first European knockout tie victory since 2004, with their domestic supremacy also under threat this season from Hearts.

"The first leg got away from us, and we gave away some soft goals, but tonight was a brilliant backs-to-the-wall performance," O'Neill told TNT Sports. —*PTI*

ISL 2025-26: AIFF refuses fresh funding

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has informed all Indian Super League (ISL) clubs that it will not pay anything afresh for the ongoing ISL season, but has warned of heavy sanctions should they delay in paying participation fees. In a letter sent to the clubs on Thursday, the Federation laid out the financial plan for the ongoing ISL season, which is running at a budget of Rs. 26.23 Cr. (including Rs. 7.92 Cr. in prize money and production cost), also underlining the payment structure for clubs. The financial sheet shows that the Federation will not inject fresh funds this season but will retain Rs. 3.448 Cr.—*PTI*

-PTI

Rinku's father dies after battling liver cancer

ALIGARH/NOIDA, 27 FEB

Indian cricketer Rinku Singh's father, Khanchand Singh, passed away at a hospital in Greater Noida early Friday after a prolonged illness, family sources and hospital officials said. Dr. Sunil Kumar, spokesperson of Yatharth Hospital in Greater Noida, where the cricketer's father was admitted, said Khanchand Singh was battling advanced-stage liver cancer. "His condition had deteriorated significantly in recent days, following which he had been admitted to the hospital on February 21. He was placed on ventilator support and breathed his last early this morning," Kumar said. Former coach of Rinku, Masood Amini, told PTI Videos in Aligarh that the cricketer's father had been battling liver cancer.—*PTI*

WTT GRAND SMASH EVENT

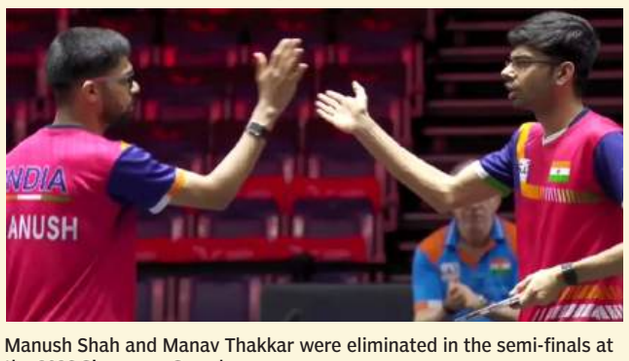
Manav-Manush face semi-final exit

KALLANG, 27 FEB

The top Indian duo of Manav Thakkar and Manush Shah faced a semi-final exit at the 2026 WTT Singapore Smash at the Infinity Arena in The Kallang on Friday.

The duo battled the higher-seeded French brothers, Alexis and Felix Lebrun, but fell short in a 5-game thriller, 6-11, 11-7, 10-12, 11-9, 8-11. This marked India's best-ever outing at a WTT Grand Smash event, as Manav and Manush were the first Indians to reach the semifinals of this top-tier WTT tournament.

The dynamic Indian duo had their moments throughout the match and looked impressive on their aggressive play against one of the best defensive returns. After dropping the first game, the Indian pair bounced back brilliantly to win the second and even had a game point opportunity in the third game as well.



Manush Shah and Manav Thakkar were eliminated in the semi-finals at the 2026 Singapore Smash -PTI

But they missed out on that, and the French pair took the game in extra points. However, Manav and Manush composed themselves and forced a decider by winning the 4th game.

In the decider, the game was very close, but in the dying moments, the Indian pair dropped a few crucial points, including an unlucky wicked deflection from the net at 10-7. Overall, a good outing for the Indian pair who finally breached the quarterfinal barrier at a WTT Grand Smash event and were very close to a final as well. —*PTI*

Rough start for Indian women golfers in Australia

WOLLONGONG, 27 FEB

It was a rough opening day for the Indians as Hitaashee Bakshi emerged the best among them at tied-48th with a card of 73 in the Ford Women's NSW Open on the Ladies European Tour here.

Pranavi Urs carded 3-over 74 while Diksha Dagar (77) was T-103rd and Avani Prashanth (80) was T-126th as the first day's play was affected by a flooded course.

The first round was suspended on Thursday and then completed later on Friday.

The first round leaders were Hannah Reeves and Kelsey Bennett, both from Australia, who shot 65 each.

They were overtaken by Irish rookie Aine Donegan, who fired a second round 63 (-8) to lead by two shots. More than half the field was still to complete 36 holes, and none of the Indians had started the second round.

It was Donegan's first start as a Ladies European Tour (LET) member, and it could not have gone better as the Irish rookie followed up an opening round 68 (-3) with a sensational 63 (-8) to soar into the lead. —*PTI*